

VZCZCXRO9540
RR RUEHAST RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDH RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHLN RUEHMA RUEHPB
RUEHPOD RUEHSL RUEHTM RUEHTRO
DE RUEHHI #0508/01 1260604
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 050604Z MAY 08 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI
TO RUEAUSA/DEPT OF HHS WASHINGTON DC
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7733
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 4663
RUEHZA/ASEAN REGIONAL FORUM COLLECTIVE
RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 3325
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5871
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 1433
RUEHGZ/AMCONSUL GUANGZHOU 0894
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0358
RUEHIN/AIT TAIPEI 1600
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHPH/CDC ATLANTA GA
RUEHRC/DEPT OF AGRICULTURE WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC//USDP/ISA/AP//
RHMFISS/CJCS WASHINGTON DC//J2/J3/J5//
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC//DHO-3//
RHMFIUU/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J00/J2/J3/J5//
RHEFAFM/DIRAFMIC FT DETRICK MD//MA-1A//
RUEHSUN/USUN ROME IT

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 HANOI 000508

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR AMBASSADOR MARK DYBUL
STATE FOR EAP/MLS, EAP/EP, INR, OES/STC, OES/IHA, OGAC
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR ANE AND GH
HHS/OSSI/DSI PASS TO OGHA (WSTEIGER/LVALDEZ/CHICKEY/KMCLEAN),
SAMHSA, FIC/NIH (RGLASS), AND FDA (MLUMPKIN/MPLAISIER)
CDC FOR COGH (SBLOUNT/JGERBERDING/MCOHEN/DBIRX)
BANGKOK FOR REO (JWALLER), USAID (RWHELDON/CBOWES/MACARTHUR/MBRADY)

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [TBIO](#) [KPAO](#) [KFLU](#) [KHIV](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: DHHS SECRETARY LEAVITT FOCUSES ON PRODUCT SAFETY, INFLUENZA
AND HIV/AIDS DURING VISIT TO HANOI

HANOI 00000508 001.2 OF 004

1. (SBU) Summary. During his visit to Hanoi, U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Michael Leavitt successfully advocated for the United States and Vietnam to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on product safety in preparation for the upcoming visit to the United States by Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung. In meetings with the Government of Vietnam (GVN) and with Vietnamese public health students and the American Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi, Secretary Leavitt emphasized the need for Vietnam, with U.S. assistance, to take proactive measures to protect the "Made in Vietnam" brand. In meetings with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), the Ministry of Health (MOH), and the Prime Minister, Leavitt thanked Vietnamese Government for its continued sharing of animal and human samples of the H5N1 strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza and urged the GVN to maintain this posture. Secretary Leavitt also advocated for Vietnam to adopt rapid testing for HIV confirmatory diagnosis, and urged the GVN to ensure that its new drug law allows for the use of medication-assisted therapy for injecting-drug users. Vietnamese and foreign journalists closely followed the Secretary Leavitt visit, and media coverage, both domestically and internationally, was extensive and positive. End Summary.

Secretary Leavitt Stresses Food Safety at MARD

2. (SBU) During his meeting with MARD Vice Minister Bui Ba Bong, Secretary Leavitt focused on the need for the GVN to protect the "Made in Vietnam" brand, particularly for the country's growing food exports. Secretary Leavitt explained that recent publicity in the

United States surrounding sub-standard products from the People's Republic of China and Honduras have caused concern among American consumers, and affected exports from those countries. He stressed that the United States wants to work with Vietnam on joint efforts to heighten vigilance on food safety, while assisting the country to upgrade and improve its food-safety laws. In light of Prime Minister Dung's planned visit to the United States, Secretary Leavitt suggested the two nations set up a working group to craft an MOU on product safety, which would focus on Vietnamese exports of food, drugs, medical devices, and (possibly) animal feed. The Secretary proposed that he and the Vietnamese Minister of Health could sign the MOU during the Prime Minister's visit to Washington in June. Secretary Leavitt also outlined President Bush's Action Plan for Import Safety and stated that the USG planned to focus on a systems approach, which increasingly could rely on the independent certification of compliance with international standards as a means to streamline the entry of imports, while maintaining food-safety protections that the American public expects. As this process develops, the Secretary explained, the United States will give priority to imports independently certified as safe, perhaps by entities accredited, but not operated, by the USG. Vice Minister Bong, who noted that 20 to 25 percent of Vietnam's agricultural exports go to the United States, agreed with the Secretary's suggestions on independent certification and the desirability of an MOU.

13. (SBU) Secretary Leavitt stressed U.S. appreciation for Vietnam's transparent and regular sharing of animal and human influenza samples of the H5N1 strain of highly pathogenic avian influenza, which are crucial to international efforts to prevent a pandemic. Vice Minister Bong reaffirmed the GVN's commitment to share samples and acknowledged strong assistance from U.S. Agency for International Development and HHS to Vietnam's efforts to combat avian influenza, particularly its attempts to develop a sustainable,

HANOI 00000508 002.2 OF 004

long-term strategy. Vice Minister Bong also reviewed the GVN's goals to increase biotechnology, including an Agricultural Biotechnology Program for 2006 to 2015, and the Prime Minister's recent approval of guidelines for field trials of biotech crops.

Secretary Leavitt Focuses on Quality Assurance
With American Chamber of Commerce

14. (SBU) Secretary Leavitt again stressed the need for building quality and safety into every step of the supply chain in a presentation to the Hanoi Chapter of the American Chamber of Commerce. Reviewing China's recent problems, and the immediate impact on consumer perceptions in the United States of Chinese products, the Secretary urged the Vietnamese Government and industry to take a proactive stance on product safety, to avoid letting one or a few adverse events define the nation's exports and damage the "Made in Vietnam" brand. The Secretary stressed the issues of product safety are not unique to the United States or Vietnam, and emphasized that the USG continues to work with our partners in the global market to ensure adequate food supplies within a sustainable safety system. Instead of focusing on border controls, he indicated, governments need to work with the private sector to build quality into every step of the process, including by using independent certification to streamline the export process and speed products into U.S. markets.

Secretary Leavitt Reviews Product Safety, Sample-Sharing, and Rapid Testing for HIV with Minister of Health

15. (SBU) At the Ministry of Health, Secretary Leavitt again emphasized the importance of product safety, especially in the context of the rapid growth in trade between the United States and Vietnam. The Secretary stressed the United States wanted to work with the GVN and Vietnamese industry to protect the reputation of Vietnamese exports. In the context of Prime Minister Dung's upcoming visit, the Secretary suggested an MOU between the two countries to promote the safety and quality of food, drugs, medical devices, and animal feed. As a starting point, the Secretary

proposed that both nations could identify working teams to begin developing this agreement as soon as possible.

¶6. (SBU) Secretary Leavitt praised Vietnam's great progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and highlighted the rapid growth of assistance to the country under the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which in funding has increased from USD 17 million in FY 2004 to USD 88 million in FY 2008. The Secretary noted USG support for the provision of methadone to injecting-drug users, to reduce heroin consumption, limit the exposure to and transmission of HIV, and assist in addiction treatment. He advocated for the GVN to draft its new drug law to ensure it permits medication-assisted therapy and a comprehensive, community-based approach to addiction treatment.

¶7. (SBU) Secretary Leavitt also suggested that the GVN allow the use of rapid testing technologies to confirm HIV diagnosis, which, in response to a question from Minister Trieu, the Secretary described as reliable, accurate, and more likely to result in referrals of HIV-infected individuals to care and treatment. Minister Trieu agreed to support methadone programs, while MOH senior staff in the Ministry agreed to cooperate with the United States on rapid testing, though they focused on its potential for screening in

HANOI 00000508 003.2 OF 004

national blood-donation campaigns. (Comment: the Secretary's appeal on rapid testing prompted a long colloquy between the Minister and members of his senior staff. In responding to Secretary Leavitt, Minister Trieu made a point of mentioning needle-exchange as a method of prevention he was encouraging, a dig at the inability of the USG to fund such programs. End comment.)

¶8. (SBU) Secretary Leavitt noted the similarity between Vietnam's health priorities and U.S. goals. The Secretary reinforced his earlier message to Vice Minister Bong at MARD and congratulated Minister Trieu on GVN's policy to continue to share all samples from all human cases of the H5N1 strain of avian influenza -- a major contribution to the global success in containing the dangerous virus so far. The Secretary pointed to the GVN's ability to enforce its new mandatory helmet law and its swift response to outbreaks of avian influenza as demonstrations of its commitment to progress in health. To further boost health cooperation between the two countries, Secretary Leavitt invited Minister Trieu to visit the USNS Mercy during its June 2008 port call in Nha Trang, during which time Vietnamese and American doctors will provide a wide variety of health-care interventions to approximately 10,000 local patients over 11 days. Minister Trieu accepted the offer to visit the USNS Mercy and the proposal to provide training on new technologies.

¶9. (SBU) Noting that the GVN had assigned the MOH to manage food safety, Minister Nguyen Quoc Trieu agreed on the necessity of completing an MOU on product safety, which he judged as consistent with the GVN's plans for substantial investments in food safety to meet international standards and to meet the expectations of its trade partners. Minister Trieu praised U.S. health assistance to his country pursuant to the bilateral Agreement on Health and Medical Science his predecessor and Secretary Leavitt signed in Washington in July 2006, and he singled out HHS efforts on influenza, along with activities by U.S. non-governmental organizations, Operation Smile (on the surgical repair of persons with cleft palates) and the Atlantic Philanthropies (on dengue).

Secretary Leavitt Engages Vietnamese
Public Health Students

¶10. (U) At the Hanoi School of Public Health, Secretary Leavitt spoke to a diverse body of several hundred students about the commitment of the United States to health in Vietnam and expressed his belief in their country's ability to develop an effective system to manage the threat of infectious diseases in the context of increased globalization. In an hour-long question-and-answer session, several students posed queries about the U.S. health-care system, the characteristics of a successful public-health strategy, U.S. dioxin-related assistance to Vietnam, and Secretary Leavitt's goals for this visit. (Comment: The session was remarkably open,

personal, and candid. Unexpectedly, Minister Trieu attended and stayed for the whole session. Several members of the audience asked, with a mix of wonder and curiosity, why the Secretary wanted to speak with students. Other young people in the crowd, which was approximately 80 percent female, inquired about the Secretary's family, and sought career advice from him. When the secretary told the students he had five children, the crowd waited for the reaction of Minister Trieu, and applauded enthusiastically after he began to clap. End comment.)

Secretary Leavitt and Prime Minister Dung
Agree on Product-Safety MOU

HANOI 00000508 004.2 OF 004

¶11. (SBU) Secretary Leavitt and Prime Minister Dung agreed their two governments should begin work on an MOU on product safety, and Prime Minister Dung tasked Minister of Health Trieu to work with HHS to prepare a draft agreement for signature during his June visit. Both the Secretary and the Prime Minister agreed on the importance of proactive steps to maintain the reputation of the Vietnamese brand as bilateral trade continues to increase. Secretary Leavitt again thanked Prime Minister Dung for Vietnamese leadership on the sharing of influenza samples. The Prime Minister noted his appreciation for support under the President's Emergency Plan to Vietnam's response to HIV/AIDS and asked for continued U.S. support for people affected by dioxin contamination (Note: some local press outlets reported this inaccurately as a request for continued assistance to "Agent Orange Victims.")

Comment

¶12. (SBU) On major health issues, the United States and Vietnam are on the same page, and Secretary Leavitt's visit helped ensure we remain so. The Secretary and his Vietnamese counterparts noted the many areas of ongoing cooperation, particularly HIV/AIDS and influenza. Vietnamese officials agreed to Secretary Leavitt's proposal to negotiate an MOU on product safety, which the GVN sees as a means to protect the country's growing food exports to the United States and to improve capacity to assure the safety of food products, both for exports and for those destined for domestic consumption. Such an MOU would supplement ongoing U.S. assistance to the GVN as it drafts a new food-safety law and would build upon negotiations between the HHS Food and Drug Administration and MARD towards an exchange of letters to create a protocol for safe exports of Vietnamese fish and seafood to the United States.

¶13. (SBU) Additionally, the Secretary can claim two successes in the Ministry of Health's positive responses to the Secretary's advocacy on behalf of rapid, confirmatory testing for HIV infection and the need to ensure that the new Vietnamese drug-control laws permit medication-assisted therapy and community-based treatment for injecting-drug users. Follow-through will be important, but, as with the Secretary's advocacy during his last visit to Vietnam, in October 2005, of the use of generic anti-retroviral drugs (a position the GVN subsequently adopted), these conversations demonstrate the value of high-level U.S. Government interventions on public policy here. End comment.]

¶14. (U) Secretary Leavitt's delegation has cleared this cable.

MICHALAK